

Discussion Series summaries: Addressing sexual and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

What is the discussion series?

The discussion series is a peer-to-peer monthly sharing and learning event involving both UK Aid Direct and UK Aid Match grant holders and their downstream partners.

The events typically begin with two grant holders presenting on a particular topic. This is followed by attendees breaking into small discussion groups to delve further into the topic and share their own experiences.

Topics for the discussion series are chosen by grant holders.

Presenters

ActionAid

ActionAid work with women and girls living in poverty. Working alongside whole communities to find solutions, ActionAid make sure women and girls are safe from harm, able to earn a living and to claim their rights and prioritise their rights and leadership during times of crisis.

Presentation

ActionAid (AA) explained its work in refugee camps in Bangladesh, which ensures that women-friendly spaces are kept open as a priority so survivors can have access to psychosocial support and relevant resources. AA has also set up a community-led sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) monitoring and referral intervention, with links to legal advisors and relevant authorities. AA's partner in Palestine conducted a women-led participatory needs-based assessment, leading to the setting up of toll-free helplines, distributing food and hygiene items, and providing counselling and legal advice to survivors. In Zimbabwe, AA's partner Jekesa Pfungwa Vulingqondo have used roadshows and radio shows to disseminate information and used bulk SMS system to spread awareness of relevant services to women and girls.

Women's Empowerment Link

[Women's Empowerment Link \(opens in web browser\)](#) invest in empowering women and girls to realise their full potential, worth and strength politically, socially and economically through advocating for their human and social justice rights.

Presentation

As COVID-19 became a national health priority in Kenya, survivors have not been able to access medical workers, aid, or health forensic experts which are crucial to SGBV support and justice processes. Women's Empowerment Link (WEL) has continued to implement its community-based approaches to raise awareness and have incorporated information and communication technologies into their methods, such as using social media and radio, to disseminate information throughout the pandemic. WEL have continued to work with the police and other relevant institutions to strengthen stakeholders' responses to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). WEL has widely publicized the National Police toll-free, 24-hour 7-day hotline which allows survivors to find support and report their case directly to the police. WEL has partnered with the national security committees to embed SGBV prevention into the current national counter COVID-19 campaign.

Key takeaways

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an undeniable effect on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV), with incident rates increasing sharply.
- As the pandemic and movement restrictions continue, the effects on people's mental health, as well as social and economic security, suggests that the incidences of SGBV and IPV will continue to increase exponentially.
- Both Women's Empowerment Link (WEL) and ActionAid (AA) advocate for a survivors-led approach to SGBV and IPV responses.
- Working with health staff is vital to make them aware of the increased risk of SGBV and IPV and how to identify and support such cases appropriately.
- Bulk SMS and radio messaging have been effective for both WEL and AA to raise awareness, stay in contact with women and girls, and to spread information on relevant services
- Community engagement for both awareness-raising as well as SGBV and IPV identification has proven to be an effective approach, for example, with radio shows.

Resources

- The free National Police hotline to report SGBV cases in Kenya, publicised by WEL, is 0800730999
- ActionAid's ['Safety with Dignity: A women-led community-based protection approach in humanitarian and protracted crises' \(opens web browser\)](#)
- [COVID-19: ActionAid's response to the surge in violence report \(opens web browser\)](#)
- [COVID-19: A women's led response \(opens web browser\)](#)
- [Gender-based violence area of responsibility \(opens web browser\)](#)

- [FCDO VAWG Helpdesk | Run by Social Development Direct \(opens web browser\)](#)
- [The impact of COVID-19 on women - UN Women \(opens web browser\)](#)

More learning resources from the Discussion Series and from UK Aid Direct can be found on [the 'Learning' pages of our website \(opens in browser\)](#).